

HOW TO CONDUCT AN INTERVIEW

Even when writing a news item a journalist will have to gather information from various sources. Speaking to people, or interviewing them, is an important way of gathering the information needed. For a news item, one would need to only one or two quotes but for a feature or profile, a journalist has to talk to the person concerned in detail, trying to know about his life, work, achievements and getting his side of the story for an interview.

The interviewing process can be quite challenging, but the journalist must remember that there is, for the most part, only one shot to get the story and when they are there, speaking to the interviewee in person, they must be on the ball. Thus, the journalist must be prepared before beginning the official interview. Whether the interview takes place over the phone or face-to-face, it is amazing how fast time seems to fly. The journalist will, in most cases, get a little less than about half an hour from the person and if they are really lucky (and usually, if the interviewee wants publicity) they might get more time. It all depends on the nature of the story that is to be written. Either way, the journalist would be wise to plan a loose outline of questions to ask for a very short interview and also have backup extra bonus questions to ask if the time carries on longer. There are few things that indicate amateur status more blatantly in the world of journalism than a reporter who runs out of questions to ask before the interviewee does.

All stories and events have multiple angles from which one could view them. The journalist should brainstorm a number of these possibilities prior to the session and attempt to ask questions that would allow for as many of those aspects to be covered as possible. Some of the best pieces of writing are produced by writers who do not determine which way the article is going to go, in terms of good guy/bad guy, or positive/negative, or whatever is best applicable to the situation being written about, until all interviews have been completed and he or she sits down to write the article.

Besides obtaining a person's undivided attention for a little bit of time, the journalist must also be able to pull off a quality interview. A successful interview would be one in which a remarkable story is unravelled and illustrated or a fascinating personality is discovered. A good journalist is one that can take any ordinary person off of the street and find a story in them. This is accomplished by experience of course, but really when it comes down to it the journalist must simply concentrate on being his or herself instead of a rigid professional interviewer. Most interviewers are under the false impression that they have to maintain a sense of authority in order to establish credibility with the interviewee and in order for the person to be somewhat scared into telling the truth.

However, in many cases the opposite is true. If a journalist acts the way they would act around a group of fellow co-workers for instance, (co-workers that were also friends), the person being questioned will be more likely to feel comfortable enough to relax in front of the journalist and it is when a person is relaxed that their true personality really shines.

The ability to put someone at ease enough to express themselves in a way that many others have never seen them do is a gift that is often not only the ticket to a great article but also a wonderful reward for the journalist.

While conducting an interview, a journalist should always pay attention to his subject (interviewee) and watch his body language. While answering a question, does the interviewee look agitated? Is he looking uncomfortable while answering a question? Is he showing some emotions (laughing, weeping or shouting) while answering questions?

These signs, if noted, will help an interviewer form an opinion of the subject and also decide whether some topic needs to be probed further, if the interviewee is feeling uncomfortable while answering it. Mentioning that the interviewee was smiling or laughing while answering a question or was angry also gives the reader an insight into the mood of the person during the interview.

Interviews could be written in different forms like question and answer format and run-through interview. The question and answer (Q & A) interview as the name suggests give the questions asked by the interviewer followed by the answers given by the interviewee. This is the most basic type of interview in which the journalist introduces the person he had interviewed (his claim to fame, the reason for doing his interview or the news angle) and follows it up with excerpts of the interview with each question followed by an answer.

The run-through interview is a story with answers given by the person interviewed woven into the body. This type of interview includes only some important quotes (answers) by the person interviewed in response to the questions. The questions are not listed but are raised in the paragraph preceding the answer (quote) given by the interviewee.

IMPORTANCE OF INTERVIEW FOR A FEATURE

An interview is a very good tool for culling out or flushing out information from people for features. It not only gives an insight into the personality of the person being interviewed but also helps one get quotes, anecdotes and interesting information that would make a feature lively, readable and entertaining.

Anecdotes are small, light and funny stories involving the person being interviewed. Most of the times, they either give an insight into the personality of the one being interviewed and also give the interview or feature a human interest angle which makes it interesting and readable.

An anecdote is always based on real life, an incident involving actual persons, whether famous or not, in real places and therefore adds colour to the article and some of them also inspire and entertain the readers.